

**LYNCHBURG CITY COUNCIL
PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
MEETING HIGHLIGHTS
Tuesday, July 14, 2015
9:00 a.m.**

Members: Council Member Turner Perrow, Chair, Council Member Joan Foster, Council Member Ceasar Johnson, Mayor Michael Gillette, ex-officio

Staff Present: Kimball Payne, Bonnie Svrcek, Don DeBerry, Scott Parkins, Gaynelle Hart, Heather Kennedy, Anna Bentson, Kent White, Lee Newland, Starlette Early

Others Present: Jody Lewis, Albemarle County

Contract Awards:

There were no new contracts awarded.

Update on Priority Projects:

Mr. Newland provided a general update on the following Capital projects:

- Wards Road Pedestrian Crossing 2B – Complete; working out liquidated damages with the contractor
- Kemper Street Bridge/Interchange 2B – Starting bridge construction; getting piers and piles in and started grading
- Memorial – Park – Lakeside Intersection – Project (intersection work at Library) was advertised and bid; projected start is August/September

There was discussion regarding status of work at Juvenile Services Group Home and potential for construction of sidewalks in front of Juvenile Group Home. Mr. Payne indicated there had been significant discussion related to installation of sidewalks and they were ultimately eliminated during the value engineering process due to their cost of \$400,000. Mr. Payne elaborated on an anticipated discussion regarding sidewalks with City Council as a result of the newly revised zoning ordinance. He anticipated the City will have a sidewalk plan that shows where gaps are and the priority areas. He also noted the timeline for the zoning ordinance, expecting it to be presented to Council by November.

There was additional discussion regarding the wrought iron fencing at Wards Road Pedestrian Crossing, paving delays on Langhorne Road at Midtown Connector, and discussion of process for bid awards for construction projects in Lower Bluff Walk area. In response to concerns about continued delay in Midtown Connector project, Council Member Perrow requested an update by the City Attorney at a future meeting of the full Council.

General Business:

1. ***Downtown Improvements*** — *The first phase of the downtown utility replacement and streetscape project is proposed for 8 segments of street along Church Street, Main Street, 7th Street and 8th Street. The proposed schedule for the work would progress along Church Street from 5th Street to 8th Street, along 8th from Church Street to Main Street, along Main Street from 5th to 8th, and conclude along 7th from Church Street to Main Street.*

Mr. Payne provided details for the expected completion of the Midtown Connector project (the base road is scheduled to be down and area open to traffic by end of year; final paving scheduled for spring

2016). He noted the first phase of the Downtown Improvements project (water line and utility replacement and streetscape) is scheduled to begin in January 2016 in order to allow for completion of the area around the Virginian hotel by its anticipated opening in spring of 2017. The main water connection is coming from 5th Street, down Church and back to 5th Street. Mr. Parsons indicated the City would like to start the Downtown Improvements project with a new water line that will be a part of the future infrastructure; by starting at 5th Street, the City can avoid tying back into old lines that adds additional costs and creates additional work in the long run.

Mr. Payne indicated finances and project management were the basis for limiting the sizing of each project segment to a 6-8 block area. He noted the City was working within pre-developed principles and goals for downtown improvement including: creating a pedestrian and business-friendly environment; maximize on-street parking; economic development minded; and environmentally and fiscally sustainable. He noted it was his belief a move to 2-way traffic, on as many streets as possible, including both Church and Main Street, with 4-way stops at each intersection, would best support a viable urban business environment.

Prior to determining “how” the process would work, Mr. Payne noted it was important to agree on these goals and principles. These would then be incorporated into the RFP’s and become the “guiding force” for working through the “how” issues. He indicated there were two things being put in place to facilitate the goals throughout the process: 1.) Bringing a contractor on board early on to finalize design, assist with traffic management issues and using CM-At-Risk; and 2.) Hiring a public relations firm with a local presence to work with the public and businesses promoting communications and a strong outreach to all stakeholders. Completing the repairs to the failing infrastructure system is essential to supporting downtown businesses in the long-term.

There were questions regarding the diagrams of 2-way traffic options presented to the PDC. While the designs depicted representations of a possible end product, it was noted that a decision about 2-way traffic has not been finalized. Mayor Gillette commented the current messaging to the public was that 2-way traffic was a necessity for managing the construction process and not necessarily a permanent outcome of the improvements. Mr. Payne indicated the CM and the community would ultimately make that decision; however, focus during construction would need to keep in mind pedestrian access to businesses and a 2-way traffic plan best supported that access. There was further discussion about the pros and cons of 2-way traffic and the messaging to the public regarding traffic flow for efficiency, safety, and business- and pedestrian-friendly as opposed to “slowing” traffic. During construction, traffic will need to discover alternate routes to the expressway instead of using downtown as an access.

There was discussion about the segmentation of the project. The overall project is scheduled to be divided in six smaller projects of areas about 6-10 blocks, the first one taking about a year to 18 months to complete. The removal of signals at intersections during construction and converting to 4-way stops was cited as most efficient and cost effective. This would also allow bicycle traffic to be incorporated into the general traffic flow, rather than designing a separate bike lane that would reduce area available for street parking.

Council Member Perrow recapped decision points to be made as: 1.) Go or no go for starting construction in January considering amount of construction currently underway in other areas of Lynchburg; 2.) How downtown functions, and 3.) Does the traffic pattern remain 2-way in the final design. Conversation included how the construction downtown connected with construction in other areas of the City. It was noted that while construction areas may be separated by actual physical miles, a

portion of the “grid system” is shutdown throughout the City and the cumulative effect of all the detours are causing citizens to grow weary of travel. Mayor Gillette believes there is a perception one cannot go anywhere in Lynchburg without having to figure out how to get there due to impact of construction. Mr. Payne noted the City is fortunate to be at a point of maintaining the infrastructure and addressing needs in many different areas rather than ignoring the necessary repairs and shutting areas down permanently. The desire is to have downtown become a destination, but because of construction in other parts of the City, it is currently used as an alternative route to the expressway and other areas. Mayor Gillette reiterated his feeling that the timing of a new project should consider the citizen’s concerns and minimize the stress created by our road systems. Council Member Johnson commented he is in favor of moving forward in a way to have roads completed in time for the opening for the Virginian hotel. Council Member Foster suggested construction sooner rather than later would help the rest of downtown better understand the outcome of all the work and would hopefully smooth the way for other phases to proceed. She felt being very friendly to the businesses during the process was imperative and using the PR firm to assist with the communications and receive feedback was most important. Mr. Payne indicated his primary concern during the construction is the impact on downtown businesses. Traffic can adjust to the construction, but business owners do not have other options.

Council Member Perrow suggested there were alternatives to completing the improvements: 1.) Delay the project until other construction projects are completed so traffic is less disrupted; 2.) Do even more construction in less time based on available funding, or 3.) Carve out smaller pieces of the project to do over a longer period and limit impact occurring at same time. There was discussion regarding the City’s pursuit of a federal Tiger grant (Dept. of Transportation’s Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grant) to assist with funding this project.

The discussion for a go now or go later decision focused on delays at the Mid-town Connector. Now a year past its scheduled completion date, it was not planned to overlap with the Kemper Street Bridge work. It is hopeful the Mid-town Connector will be open to traffic flow by the end of December and will alleviate some of the traffic issues in that area. Mayor Gillette suggested that knowing the delay of Mid-town Connector should be the impetus for the City to adjust timing of its next project. Rather than just proceeding with the next project as scheduled, Mayor Gillette felt it was important the City re-sync the timing of its next major project. Mr. Payne pointed out that borrowed bond funds that required timely expenditure and an agreement with owners of the Virginian that this work would be completed would not allow this project to remain on hold for an extended period of time.

The PDC, with concerns about the timing and impact on citizens, agreed the project should move forward. Mr. Payne indicated the next important step is to identify the CM and the PR firm. Working together, the CM, PR firm and staff, will determine the best plan of “how” this will be accomplished. There was discussion regarding the details available to provide to citizens in the upcoming public meeting on Thursday. It was thought the best use of this meeting was to inform stakeholders of the process to develop the plan and ask for their input and concerns before decisions are made.

In a discussion about “what” would be done during the project, Mr. DeBerry explained the overall project would replace the utilities and re-construct the street behind it. Current plan designs for the intersections would allow for either 1 or 2-way traffic flow. The public meeting would involve getting feedback regarding the flow and design of streetscapes. Streetscapes can potentially change from block to block depending on what is going on in the buildings on those blocks to accommodate loading zones, wider sidewalks, etc. There was additional conversation regarding parking availability with streetscape designs and importance of availability based on type of businesses along the street.

Council Member Foster suggested the importance of also answering the question “why” the City is doing this project. If this question is answered to the satisfaction of stakeholders and all citizens, she noted the “how” and “when” will follow along and everyone will be more tolerant of disruptions and inconveniences. Ms. Hart added that discussions about this project initially did not include any streetscape improvements. It was a project only to replace the failing infrastructure, but the streetscape improvements have been added as a way of leaving areas better than before the project is completed.

The PDC talked about some of the questions that will be asked by stakeholders as the project moves forward and plans are developed. In general, Mr. DeBerry indicated their questions will focus on: how the project is going to progress; how will it impact “me”, and how long will it take. There was discussion about a baseline standard streetscape that will be developed with flexibility for each property owner to “upgrade” at their expense or make changes that are sensitive to the streetscape needs around their particular buildings based on their branding, etc. Mr. Payne indicated a personal visit would be made to every business downtown.

A final review of the anticipated schedule was recapped: An 18-month projected timeline for first phase of project with construction beginning as early as January. The CM is expected to be hired in mid-September and public outreach will begin. The format of the Thursday meeting was also reviewed. Ms. Kennedy noted her involvement with a similar project in a different state and reiterated the importance of early meetings with stakeholders to allow them a sufficient opportunity to plan on their own. She and Mr. DeBerry would be making the personal visits to businesses and informing them of the process. Council Member Perrow wrapped up the discussion with one final call for questions or comments.

Roll Call:

Mayor Gillette reported he had received a citizen inquiry regarding whether a study might be appropriate to determine need for a traffic signal at the intersection of Nationwide and McConville Road. Mr. DeBerry indicated a study has been conducted and the plan is to construct a mini roundabout, at approximately the same cost as a traffic signal. However, funding is not currently available for this project and will require waiting until it can be added to the CIP, or receive revenue sharing funds, or left-over funding from maintenance.

Next meeting: August 11, 2015